

Fort Mifflin, Mud Island
Hospital (Mess House)
Mud Island
Marine and Penrose Ferry Road
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1225-I

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY HABS No. PA-1225 I

FORT MIFFLIN HOSPITAL (Mess House)

Location: Approximately 300 feet east of the rampart of Fort Mifflin, Mud Island, Marine and Penrose Ferry Roads, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: City of Philadelphia.

Present Use: Historic site museum.

Significance: Built circa 1819, the hospital was located outside of the fort but shared characteristics with structures inside the fort. In 1837, it was converted to a mess house.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A hospital was first proposed by Major William Linnard, who reported to Quartermaster General Thomas Jessup on November 6, 1819, "The present Hospital ...is a miserable frame building & would cost more to repair than it would be worth when done ...a permanent one is thought to be necessary by the Surgeons & Officers of the post" (Consolidated Correspondence File, RG 92, NAB). Linnard included proposed sketches which approximate the present structure, and the hospital was apparently built soon after. A report from Linnard mentioned "The new Hospital outside the Fort a Brick building, two stories high, sixty-five by twenty-one feet, three rooms on each floor, a Piazza in front seven feet wide, the length & height of the building" (n.d., Consolidated Correspondence File 1794-1915, box 662, RG 92, NAB). Although the report was not dated, Linnard died in 1835, so the hospital was undoubtedly built before the fort was temporarily abandoned in 1824. The dimensions indicate that the building was constructed with a kitchen wing, one slightly smaller than the one-story kitchen wing that appeared on Belin's 1839 plan and elevation (CGM #71). In 1837 the annual report of the War Department noted, "a mess-house and mess-room are now fitting up" (ASP 7:632), and Belin's plans labelled this structure "Mess House." For additional information, see Fort Mifflin History (PA-1225).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Although it features a two-story porch across the front, the Hospital has plain box columns, wood railing, and very little ornamentation.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair, porch is deteriorating.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: This two-story building has a five-bay front, 50'-6", by 26'-5" including the porch.
2. Foundations: Probably brick.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The brick walls, laid in common bond, are painted white over a yellow wash. The vertical joints of the header courses, every sixth course, are aligned with the vertical joints of the adjacent stretcher courses.
4. Structural system: The load-bearing walls support the 2 7/8" x 11 3/4" second floor joists, which span the front and rear walls, and the roof structure with 3" x 6 3/4" ceiling joists and 2 3/4" x 5 1/2" rafters.
5. Porches: Six, two-story, square, chamfered wood columns with Doric-type capitals extend to a boxed beam supporting the porch roof. The columns, which are set on beveled gneiss plinths upon gneiss curbing around which brick paving is laid in a herringbone pattern, extend through the gallery and carry the wood floor structure. Beams which extend perpendicularly from the walling to each column support longitudinal joists and the gallery's modern decking. Each bay between the columns at the gallery level is filled with wood balustrading having plain top and

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bottom rails inset with thin, square section balusters. A straight run, open riser stairway is located in the center of the porch adjacent to the walling and has plain wood rails and newels.

The existing stairway probably replaced the original stairway at the south end of the porch, indicated in the 1839 plan and elevation drawings.

6. Chimneys: At each end elevation two brick chimneys rise from the apex of the gables and have two-course corbeled brick chimneys below a single course at the top of the stack. Originally a third chimney rose from the center of the northeast rear elevation, behind the eave, to the height of the existing chimneys.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorway and doors: At each floor level two doorways open out onto the porch and gallery. An end elevation doorway, located near the west corner at the first floor level, has a plain frame with a four cross-panel door. The facade doorways have modern frames at the first floor and mortise and tenon frames at the second floor which retain hinge pintles for shutters or blinds. With the exception of the paneled and glazed door at the second floor's south opening, the two-panel doors are modern. The 1839 drawings of the structure indicate that there was a third doorway at each floor level in the center adjacent to each south doorway.
- b. Windows and shutters: The original window frames, with plain sills, are trimmed with an ovolo backband and are hung at the first floor of the southwest facade (except in the center window)

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with eight-over-twelve-light sashes and at the second floor with twelve-over-twelve-light sashes. The sashes are of mortise and tenon construction and retain much original glass. At the northeast rear elevation the six bays are hung with six-over-six-light sashes as is the one facade window opening. Hinge pintles remain for shutters or blinds in all the frames. All the window openings of the two bays of each end elevation have been bricked up.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape and covering: The wood-shingled gabled roof of the building extends over the porch with a change in pitch.
- b. Cornice and eaves: Above the column capitals, the boxed beam, with an architrave and frieze separated by an applied fillet, forms a full entablature with a cornice having an ovolo-cavetto bed molding, a corona, and an echinus crown molding. The cornice has returns at the end elevations. Three courses of corbeled brick form a cornice at the northeast rear elevation. At the rakes, bargeboards extend between the eaves and the chimneys.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The floor plan, originally three lineal rooms, now consists of one large room, a furnace room and a toilet room. At the second floor, the space has been altered into two large rooms, one of which has a small corner enclosure.
2. Flooring: The flooring is concrete at the first floor and modern hardwood, tongue and groove stock at the second floor.

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3. Wall and ceiling finish: Furred out plasterboard.
4. Doorways and doors: The modern, plain board trimmed doorways lack doors.
5. Mechanical equipment: Originally each room of each floor had a fireplace, all of which are now closed and plastered over. The building contains modern lighting, heating and plumbing.

D. Site and Surroundings:

Facing southwest, the Mess House is located approximately 300 feet east of the rampart of the fort and is separated from the fort by a chain link fence and a driveway. The grade adjacent to the Mess House has been raised approximately 2'-0" above the first floor level.

As indicated in the 1839 plan and elevation of the Mess House, a one-story gabled roof kitchen wing extended out from the northwest elevation. The wing was the width of the main structure and approximately 22' long with a side doorway and two window openings which had twelve-over-twelve-light sash. Located at the kitchen's northwest end wall was a fireplace with ranges having cook tops and kettle holes on either side of the chimney breast.

Prepared by Rodd L. Wheaton
Architect
Historic American Buildings
Survey
Spring, 1974.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Fort Mifflin projects of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) were carried out during the summers of 1969 and 1970 with grants from the Haas Community Funds in cooperation with the Philadelphia Historical Commission, the Independence National Historical Park, and the Shackamaxon Society, Inc. The projects were under the

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direction of James C. Massey, Chief, HABS. The 1969 survey team was supervised by R. Michael Schneider (Texas A & M University) with student assistant architects Allan H. Steenhusen (Iowa State University), Bruce V.A. Bonacher (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute), and Malcolm Heard, Jr. (Tulane University). The 1970 survey team was supervised by Allan H. Steenhusen (Iowa State University) with architect Ronald B. Tjerandsen (University of Washington) and student assistant architect John T. Shumate (Carnegie-Mellon University). The drawings were completed in 1971 by HABS architect Allan H. Steenhusen and student assistant architect Tim Wolosz (University of Cincinnati). The drawings were edited in 1972-73 under the direction of John C. Poppliers, Chief, HABS, by HABS architects Rodd L. Wheaton and John A. Burns with student assistant architect K. Barry Peckham (University of Cincinnati). Historian for the project was A.C. (Gus) Hamblett until 1972. The data was then edited by several members of HABS staff, including Rodd L. Wheaton, John A. Burns, and Philip Hamp, and completed by Alison K. Hoagland in 1979.